Is Pennsylvania German A Language?

AN OLD DISPUTE

Our attention has recently been called to an old dispute which was reported in THE EDUCATOR, (Kutztown, Pa.) edited by the Reverend A. R. Horne, for January, 1873, and which may still be read with interest 66 years later. Many of our readers will remember the Reverend A. M. Horne as the editor of the once popular PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN MANUAL, or M HORNE SEI PENNSILFAWNISH DEITSH BUCH.—Ed.

Quite an animated discussion had taken place at the Lehigh County Institute on the Pennsylvania German question. In the EDUCATOR for January, 1873 we read: "The editor of the EDUCATOR maintained that Pennsylvania German is a language, and his standpoint was violently assaulted by Prof. Braulick of Allentown. This debate like most other institute discussions would have attracted no further notice had not some Allentown papers taken up the subject and tried to excite prejudice against our position. . ."

The following extract from the ALLENTOWN DAILY NEWS will explain the subject. "Rev. Horne next appeared upon the floor (during the Friday afternoon's proceedings). He said that the wants of the Pennsylvania German element should occupy the attention of all educators. He said they were often spoken of as the "dumb Dutch." This was not so. He spoke of the intelligence of the German nation. He said our Pennsylvania Germans were characterized by the same spirit as those of the mother country. Our forefathers settled here, they felled the forests, they settled the country, but had to a certain extent neglected the education of their children. But that day is past. The Pennsylvania Germans are aroused to the great interest of education. German Pennsylvania has done more for education than any other section within the last ten years. As evidence of this he called the attention of the Institute to the fact of salaries, school houses, etc. as an illustration of this fact. The Pennsylvania Germans are the bone and sinew of this part of the country. They have a right to their language. He denied that the Pennsylvania German was not a language.

Prof. Braulik denied that the Pennsylvania German was a language. He said it was only a dialect, and it had no grammar. The question was asked what composed the Pennsylvania German language. He said it was only German with a change of termination. (Mr. Lyttle asked whether the Pennsylvania tongue was a language or a dialect. Rev. Horne said it was a language. Prof. Braulik rose and emphatically denied the same (Applause) . . . He said to Rev. Horne, "You have no grammar, no literature for yourself." Rev. Horne asked the Professor, "What is grammar?" Prof. Braulik said: "A grammar is a systematical solidity of rules for a language, and the language the means of communicating the thoughts correctly according to that system." Mr. Lyttle inquired of Mr. Horne whether he would teach the Pennsylvania German as a language in his school. He replied, "Yes, I would." (Great Applause).

Prof. N. C. Schaeffer took up the subject. He said: "It has been said that Pennsylvania German is no language, because it has no grammar. This argument is false. The Greek language is the most perfect in existence . . . The most elegant writers of the tongue, such as Plato and Homer, knew nothing of grammar, because the science of grammar originated many years afterwards, when the natives of Athens began to instruct the young Romans in foreign languages. Hence it cannot be said that the "dutch" is no language, because it has no grammar. Pennsylvania German is much older than the classic German. This is shown by the fact that we use many words in their original sense, whereas in classic German these words have undergone a change of meaning."

The Allentown Daily News continues the argument editorially: "Professor Horne of the Keystone State Normal School, succeeded in creating a sensation and eliciting applause from some of the teachers at the Institute yesterday, by maintaining that the dialect commonly known as "Pennsylvania Dutch" is a language, and, in reply to a question, emphatically asserting that he would teach it as a language in the school-room. It is difficult to understand how the learned Professor can maintain such a position as this in face of the fact that there are no text books in existence for the use of scholars, and that without them the utmost that can be expected of pupils is to pick up the "language" just as the children do now, from hearing it spoken. The enthusiasm of some of the defenders of the dialect has ere now carried them to the length of proposing that this little defect should be remedied, and the construction of a Pennsylvania Dutch Grammar be set about immediately. We have no desire to ridicule enthusiasm that is engendered of a very real feeling for the "good old language of our fathers" and associated with sentimental recollections of the early words lisped at a mother's knee. Nevertheless, it appears to us that a gentleman in Prof. Horne's position should be practical rather than sentimental, and advocate that which would be for the benefit of the rising generation, even though it run counter to the prejudices of the generation that is passing away. The old things that are passing away have held back the people of Pennsylvania for many years, and among them, it is admitted, none has been a more serious bar to their progress in moral and scientific culture than this same Pennsylvania German. Either the German or the Pennsylvania Dutch must give way in this locality, and it is not difficult to see which it will be, in spite of Prof. Horne and others. To set up the claims of a dialect with nothing to recommend it except that it was spoken (it could not be written) by the early settlers here, against a language so rich in literature, so admirable in construction and so beautifully adapted to the expression of lofty thought as the German is ridiculous, though it be done by twenty Professors. Whatever tender recollections of childhood may cluster round the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect (and we do not for one moment make light of them), they must not be, and they will not be, permitted to interfere with the progress of the youthful Pennsylvanians in our public schools. Pure English, or pure German, or better still, both of them, should and will be taught. It does not seem to us to require much consideration to determine that it is the wiser course to teach the rising generation to read German books and understand German preaching, instead of turning backward so that the dialect shall be elevated into a language that can be taught in our schools, and in which a Bible can be printed, wherefrom ministers may take their texts."

The above editorial is followed by the following remarks by the Editor of the EDUCATOR, the Reverend A. M. Horne:

It would be entirely out of place, without a previous agreement on the terms employed, to enter into a discussion with the "Allentown Daily News" upon the subject whether Pennsylvania German is a language or a dialect, inasmuch as the whole matter hinges upon the definition of the terms. Here lay the cause of a disagreement among the debaters of this question at the Allentown Institute. If we accept their definition of language and dialect, then undoubtedly Prof. Braulik and the "News" are correct. But what business have they to make their own definitions. Have not we as good a right to use our authorities, as they have to accommodate their definitions to their assertions? We asked Prof. Braulick on the floor of the Lehigh County Institute: "What is your definition of a language?" To this he replied, "a language must have a grammar." We then asked him, "Was the Greek, Latin and German no languages before they had a grammar?" To this he replied: "I can't express myself."

Dr. Blair, a standard authority, says: "Language signifies the expression of our ideas by certain articulate sounds, which are used as the signs of those ideas."

Webster, another good authority, defines language to consist in the oral utterance of sounds, which usage has made the representative of ideas.

Heyse, who should certainly be regarded as an authority by our German friends, says: "Sprache—die Gedankenaeuszerung durch Worte" (Language is the expression of thought by means of words). —It is useless to quote any more authorities on this subject. Who are right in their definition of what constitutes language, Prof. Braulik and the "Allentown News," or Blair, Webster and Heyse.

The Pennsylvania Germans either use a language or they do not . . . What difference does it make whether we call Pennsylvania German a language or a dialect. We are not particular about the word. We prefer to say language, Prof. Braulik and the "Allentown News" may say dialect. It does not always matter by what name we call a thing. "A rose by any other name, etc." The principle remains the same under either name. Yes, we would teach Pennsylvania German in school, we would make use of it, wherever necessary to explain a point to a Pennsylvania German pupil, if he cannot understand an English or a purely German expression. Yes, we would be practical rather than sentimental, and use every lawful means for illustration in the school room though it be Pennsylvania German, and if we can find a more expressive term in that language than in German or English, even at the risk of being pitched into, "iwwer die Kohle genumme zu warre," by a hypercritical professor or editor, we will do it.

We argue by no means that the Hochdeutsch should be superseded or displaced by the Pennsylvania German, per contra, we would have it taught in every school to the fullest possible extent. Yes, the Pennsylvania German is a fact, a reality, it is spoken by two thirds of our population east of the Susquehanna, and spoken by 500,000 persons in Pennsylvania who have no other medium by which to express themselves. It has a literature in papers and books, and claims equal, if not greater antiquity, in a number of its words than the "Hochdeutsch"—these are facts, which we as educators dare not ignore, and, if we do, we commit the same mistake, which European Germans, and Americans have persistently made during the last one hundred years—from which we have suffered irretrievably.

It is high time that we should awake to realize our position, and the Pennsylvania German who proves recreant to his trust in this particular, denying his parentage, and is ashamed of his mother-tongue should be condemned as a traitor, who is fitted for stratagem and spoil.

We are all co-laborers in the one same great cause, there is no time to fight on the way, we have no energies to waste in bickering—let us no longer waste our resources but unite in laboring for the common good, and though we may differ in the definitions of terms, may we for once, at least, whether European or Pennsylvania German, or English American, lay aside our prejudices, selfishness, and personal feelings, and make common cause in the great work of developing the talents of our Pennsylvania Germans. This can be done, no by casting flings at them as the "dumb Dutch," but acceding to them their rights and recognizing in them that talent, energy, industry, honesty and high-toned religious sentiment, that love of country, family, home and God, for which they are proverbial, wherever their character is rightly understood.

(Sixty-six years have passed since the above dispute took place and those who had participated in it have long since departed this life. Similar disputes have taken place and no doubt others will follow. In the meantime the Pennsylvania German continues to be spoken by hundreds of thousands. Speech is more tenacious and enduring than those whose lips pronounce it.—Today we are satisfied to agree with scholars in general that Pennsylvania German is a dialect, one of some two hundred German dialects. Of course dialects also have their grammar, whether written or waiting to be written, for the grammar of any tongue is only the behavior of that tongue with relation to its parts of speech. Dialects also have their literature, and German dialect literature is today looked upon as a vital part of German literature. Only recently a history of our own Pennsylvania German literature appeared in Leipzig. See the ECK for June 17th.—ED.)

Es Picknick Fiewer

Now iss es Picknick Fiewer do,
Mir sin aa unerschprechlich fro;
Zu lang hen mir gelidde mit
Dyspepsy, Bauchweh un der Grip,
Un Rummadis, un zu viel Gall,
Un's Picknick Fiewer biet sie all;
So nemmt mer now en gudi Zeit
Un geht ab noch de Picknick heit.

Die gans Fmilie, un der Hund,
Die travele noch em Picknick Grund.
Darrich Schtaab un alle Hitz un Wedder,
Bei Fuss un alle Sarte Redder;
Mer nemmt die Bewwy bei Surprise
Un fiehrt sie noch dem Paradeis,
Wu yeders haerrlich iss mit "pop"
Un Ice-cream in seim Hawwersack.

Die Band geht vannehaer un macht
En wunnerbaari grandi Yacht;
Es geht em noch em Kopp wie Wei,
Mer kann net ruhich schteh debei;
Un wann ich bissel dans un wals,
Dann hoff ich waerd's vergewwe als,
Far seller Knippel uf de Drumm
Schlagt Schliwwere aus meim Grischtendum.

Am Picknick Grund dart sin mer eens
Un schpiele alle Sarte Games;
Race schpringe wie en Schtraahle Blitz
Iss G'schpass in so 're gliedich Hitz;
Un Balle schpiele bis der Schpeck
Em rausrinnt an de Hosseseck;
Un alsemol en Maedel dricke,
Sell g'heert doch aa zu dem Picknicke.

Der Parre macht en glee Address.
Die ann're mache en hungrich G'fress.
Un eb er naegscht kummt an's Gebet
Schpringt yeders far en bess'ri Weed,
Un weist sei Hunger iss ken Sham
Un schtofft sei alder Diaphragm
Mit Hinkel, Kuche, un so Koscht,
Bis sei Kalbleder Belt schier bust.

Die Tillie hockt sich uf en Schtumpe
In ihre feine seidne Lumbe,
Un schwarze Umense sin dart,
Die schpiele schteckle as es batt,
Un schpringe nuf an ihre Bee!
Dann scharrt die Till wie'n Hund mit Flee,
Un schprengt die Gallusgnepp schier ab,
Un 's iss en gross Excitement dart.

Der Daadi hot en gross Schtick Pie
Un schafft's zu seine Schtarze nei,
Un dreizeh Micke nemme en Reid
Uf sellem Schtick zu Ewigkeit!
Un Keffer, Schkieters un so Dinger,
Die fliege iwwerall iwwer's Dinner,
Un kennt mer's zaehle odder messe,
Dann hett mer Germs beim dausend g'fresse.

Uf Angel Cake mit alle Beiss,
Gehn Germs der Weg noch Paradeis;
Un alle maulvoll Hinkel nemmt
En Million Microbes schnell zum End;
Un gingt mer efter wennich fart
Un hett en Picknick, nemm mei Wart,
Dann waere Germs un Microbes raar;
Des glaaw ich iss verhaftich waahr.

Far wann's em iwwel iss graad do,
Un alles scheint em schwarz un blo,
Un wann mer fiehlt wie'n alder Hund,
En Picknick macht em frisch un g'sund.
Mer sin of course e wennich matt
Mit so viel Germs im Hawwersack,
Awwer marye sin sie all digest,
Noh gucke mer am very bescht.

En Picknick iss en bully Zeit,
Do kumme all die Nochbersleit
Un saage: "Hullo, Bill, bin froh,
Bei Gosch dich widder sehne do!"
Un Weiwer as net oft vun heem
Viel weiter as die Picknick gehn,
Die saage, "Ei du liewer, ei, ei, ei,
Des iss yo die Betz! Good-bye!"

—SOLLY HULSBUCK
(1871—1939)

Wie die Leit's Nemme Bei Me Landregge

DER HITZKOPP:

"Schtaern Gewitter Dunnerkeitel!
As mer schier verzwaerzle kennt
Bei dem miseraawle Wetter,
Meent des hett yo gaar ke End.

Waart yuscht, Laabfrosch, alder Greckser!
Meenscht ich fang der noch en Mick,
Fer des viele Reggewetter?
Ich verbrech der liewer's Gnick!

Un des Wetterglass, des lumpich,
Muss mer aa noch aus em Haus;
Wann des Wetter sich net ennert
Schmeiss ich's noch zum Fenschter naus!

Regge kummt noch immer runner,
'S iss de Fisch yo bal verleed;
Daet 's dem Wettermann noch gunne
Wann er aa versaufe daet.

Regge — Regge — nix wie Regge,
Wie mit Kiwwel kummt er bei, —
Schtaern Gewitter Dunnerkeitel!
Suddelwetter — Seierei!"

DER GEDULDICH:

"Reggewetter,
Liewi Zeit,
Schun e Woch lang
Un aa heit!

'S iss waahrhafdich
Nimmi schee,
'S werd mer schteif
In meine Bee!

Doch, was batt's dann
Wann mer brummt?
Am beschte iss,
Mer nemmt's wie's kummt.

'S blogt eem aa
Ke Hitz un Schtaab —
Frisch un grie
Iss alles Laab.

Werd der Himmel
Widder blo,
Dann iss alles
Doppelt froh!"

DER GRIWWELKOPP:

"Ach Gott, 's iss nimmi auszuhalde,
Ach Gott, ich glaab ich kumm noch um!
Ach Gott, was soll dann des noch waerre?
Ich druwwel mich noch bucklich, grumm!

Ich hab der Huschte un der Schnuppe
Un aa en weher, g'schwollner Hals;
Es batt ken Tee un aa kon Droppe,
Ken Hunnich un ken Englisch Salz!

Ich will aa net zum Dokter schpringe,
Ich weess, ich grick die Rhummedis,
Es zwickt mich schun, o Haerriyarem!
Nau hawwich aa noch kalte Fiess!

Ach kent ich doch uf Schtelze laafe
Wie sellemols als gleener Bu.
Des Wetter schlackt mer uf die Naerve,
Bal weess ich nimmi was zu du!

Ich bin so maerb wie'n nasses Bretzel,
Mei Greiz iss a noch schteckeschteif,
Ich glaab, ich glaab ich mus bal schtearwe,
Es schmackt mer net emol die Peif!"

DER GLEICHGILTICH:

Liewer Friede! Guck mol anne!
'S reggert, reggert immer noch.
Well, des iss emol en kalti,
Ufgeweechti, nassi Woch!

Un was iss aa do zu mache?
'S aller bescht, mer bleibt deheem;
Ya, do geht mer net schpaziere,
'S droppst yo runner vun de Baem!

Brauch sich net der Kopp verbreche,
Weil des hett yo gaar ke Zweck;
Denk, mer geht aa net in's Waertshaus,
Net bei all dem Suddeldreck!

Aldi, bring mer mol mei Kaffi!
Bissel Dunkes waer net schlecht,
Un — des waer aa net so iwwel —
Mach mer aa mei Bett zurecht!

Ya, des maag so runner giesse,
Hot yo'n Dach, do kummt nix rei.
Ich geh hie un leg mich schlofe
Un loss Regge — Regge sei!"

—JOHN BIRMELIN
Adapted from Lina Sommer's
SO SACHE